

Message Text

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MILITARY ADDRESSEES ALSO FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: FR, UR

SUBJECT: FRANCO-SOVIET RELATIONS TURN SOUR

REF: A) PARIS 16298, DAO PARIS 16294

1. SUMMARY: SHARP FRENCH CRITICISMS OF SOVIET HUMAN RIGHTS POLICIES AND THE SOVIET-CUBAN ROLE IN AFRICA, COUPLED WITH THE OUTLANDISH SOVIET ACCUSATIONS ABOUT THE FRENCH INTERVENTION IN SHABA AND CANCELLATION OF A VISIT HERE BY SOVIET CHIEF OF STAFF OGARKOV, MARK THE LOWEST POINT IN FRANCO-SOVIET RELATIONS SINCE DE GAULLE FIRST INITIATED DETENTE. RELATIONS BETWEEN PARIS AND MOSCOW HAVE BEEN DETERIORATING SLOWLY OVER THE LAST YEAR, BUT A FACADE OF UNDERSTANDING WAS MAINTAINED BECAUSE IT SERVED THE PURPOSES OF BOTH SIDES. COOLER FRENCH RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIETS ARE TO SOME DEGREE A PRODUCT OF FRENCH ACTIONS (E.G. IN ZAIRE) WHICH ARE IN THE US INTEREST. BUT WE WOULD CAUTION AGAINST ASSUMING THAT THE PARIS-MOSCOW RIFT WILL AUTOMATICALLY MAKE THE FRENCH MORE COOPERATIVE WITH US THAN THEY WOULD OTHERWISE BE; IN FACT, THEY MAY FEEL OBLIGED TO DISTANCE
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THEMSELVES PUBLICLY FROM US ON SOME ISSUES IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THEIR INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY IMAGE. END SUMMARY.

2. WITHIN LESS THAN TWO WEEKS, A NUMBER OF EVENTS HAVE SHOWN FRANCO-SOVIET RELATIONS TO BE AT THEIR LOWEST POINT SINCE DE GAULLE INITIATED THE POLICY OF DETENTE. THIS LATEST ROUND BEGAN MAY 18, FOLLOWING SENTENCING OF SOVIET DISSIDENT TURI ORLOV. SOVIET HANDLING OF THIS CASE PROVOKED UNIVERSAL CONDEMNATION IN FRANCE, WITH EVEN THE FRENCH COMMUNIST DAILY HUMANITE DEVOTING TWO SHARPLY CRITICAL EDITORIALS TO THE SUBJECT ("A DENIAL OF JUSTICE;" "A NEGLECT OF BASIC FREEDOMS;" "A DETERIORATION OF DEMOCRATIC FREEDOM IN THE USSR"). THE OFFICIAL GOF REACTION WAS ALSO SHARP; THE QUAI D'ORSAY ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE WHICH SAID IN PART, "FRANCE CONSIDERS THAT THE PROSECUTION OR CONDEMNATION OF INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS BECAUSE THEY ASK THAT THE FINAL ACT BE RESPECTED AND APPLIED IN THEIR COUNTRY CONFORMS NEITHER WITH THE DISPOSITIONS OF THE FINAL ACT, NOR WITH THE FRANCO-SOVIET DECLARATION OR INTERNATIONAL DETENTE SIGNED AT RAMBOUILLET ON JUNE 22, 1977, NOR

WIH THE SPIRIT OF DETENTE." THIS POSITION APPEARS
ESPECIALLY BLUNT WHEN CONTRASTED WITH THE CAUTION ON
HUMAN RIGHTS IN EAST-WEST RELATIONS WHICH GISCARD AD-
VOCATED IN HIS NEWSWEEK INTERVIEW OF LAST SUMMER.

3. THE FRENCH INTERVENTION IN SHABA ADDED A PARTICULAR-
LY BITTER SOVIET-FRENCH CONTRETEMPS. THE SOVIETS, WHO
HAVE LONG BEEN UNHAPPY WITH FRANCE'S ACTIVIST AFRICAN
POLICY, ACCUSED THE FRENCH SHRILLY OF ACTUALLY BEING
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BLOODSHED IN KOLWEZI, AN OUTLANDISH
ACCUSATION WHICH BROUGHT FONMIN DE GUIRINGAUD TO
RESPOND IN KIND. GUIRINGAUD INSTRUCTED THE FRENCH

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - T E X T (L A S T S E V E N L I N E S P A R A 3 A D D E D)

AMBASSADOR IN MOSCOW TO LODGE A PROTEST, AND IN A TV APPEARANCE SAID THAT TASS WAS MISTAKEN. HE ACCUSED THE CUBANS DIRECTLY OF BEING RESPONSIBLE, AND IMPLIED THAT THE USSR (AND POSSIBLY ALSO THE GDR) WAS BEHIND THE CUBANS. ALMOST SIMULTANEOUSLY THE SOVIETS CANCELLED THE VISIT TO FRANCE OF CHIEF OF STAFF OGARKOV, WHICH WAS SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 13-14.

4. THESE LATEST EVENTS DO NOT, HOWEVER, REPRESENT A SUDDEN CHANGE IN FRENCH RELATIONS WITH MOSCOW. INDEED, E "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP" SOUGHT BY DE GAULLE PROBABLY BEGAN DETERIORATING WHEN THE SOVIETS FLATLY REJECTED GISCARD'S SOMEWHAT NAIVE 1975 PROPOSAL FOR "IDEOLOGICAL DETENTE." SINCE THAT TIME THE FRENCH HAVE CONTINUED TO LOOK IN VAIN FOR SIGNS OF GOOD WILL FROM MOSCOW. MOREOVER, WITHIN THE LAST YEAR A NUMBER OF DEVELOPMENTS HAVE COME TOGETHER WITH THE EFFECT OF DEEPENING FRENCH DISILLUSIONMENT WITH SOVIET BEHAVIOR, PROVOKING SOVIET ANNOYANCE WITH FRENCH INITIATIVES, AND LEADING /RANCE TO ASSERT ITSELF IN AREAS WHICH WERE BOUND TO HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP:

-- AFRICA: THE FRENCH FEEL BOUND BY LONGSTANDING RELATIONS WITH AFRICA TO COME TO THE ASSISTANCE OF

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FRIENDLY REGIMES WHICH ASK FOR HELP. THIS IS NOT ONLY AN HISTORIC FRENCH RESPONSIBILITY, BUT ALSO REFLECTS GISCARD'S VIEW THAT STABILITY IN AFRICA IS ESSENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, WHICH IS IN OVERALL WESTERN INTERESTS. BUT FRENCH INTERVENTIONS IN WESTERN SAHARA, CHAD AND SHABA HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN SEEN BY THE KREMLIN AS A CHALLENGE, WHICH COULD EVEN LEAD, IN SOME FUTURE SITUATION, TO MORE DIRECT EAST-WEST CONFRONTATION.

-- HUMAN RIGHTS: FOLLOWING THE CAUTIOUS APPROACH OF HIS NEWSWEEK INTERVIEW, GISCARD WAS FACED WITH A DOMESTIC POLITICAL OPPOSITION WHICH DEMANDED A MORE FORTHRIGHT POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THE US ROLE IN BELGRADE. GISCARD STILL SOUGHT TO MEDIATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, BUT HIS LAST-MINUTE PRIVATE APPEAL TO BREZHNEV ON CONCLUDING THE BELGRADE MEETING WAS REJECTED. SINCE THEN, HEAVY-HANDED SOVIET TREATMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS CASES HAS PERMITTED NOTHING LESS THAN INDIGNANT PUBLIC CRITICISM.

-- DISARMAMENT: PRODDER BY THE FRENCH LEFT, GISCARD HAS LAUNCHED AN AMBITIOUS DISARMAMENT PROGRAM TO WHICH HE ATTACHED HIS OWN PRESTIGE IN HIS NEW YORK SPEECH. THE SOVIETS ARE OPPOSED TO VIRTUALLY ALL THE FRENCH IDEAS, AND ARE WARY OF THE DIRECTIONS IN WHICH AN ACTIVE FRENCH ROLE IN DISARMAMENT MATTERS COULD LEAD. THEY PROBABLY ARE ALSO UPSET THAT THE FRENCH WENT AHEAD WITH THEIR INITIATIVES AFTER BEING DISCOURAGED FROM DOING SO IN BILATERAL CONSULTATIONS.

-- CHINA: AS POST-MAO CHINA HAS BEGUN LOOKING FOR SUPPLIERS OF TECHNOLOGY AND ARMS, FRANCE HAS EMERGED AS A KEY POTENTIAL WESTERN PARTNER, TO THE IRRITATION AND ANGER OF THE USSR, WHICH HAS WARNED THE FRENCH NOT TO SUPPLY ARMS TO PEKING. THE FRENCH HAVE OBVIOUS

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ECONOMIC INTEREST IN DEVELOPING RELATIONS WITH THE CHINESE, BUT THEY ALSO SEE THE RELATIONSHIP AS AN ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY A GREAT POWER ROLE, WHILE ENHANCING THEIR INDEPENDENT IMAGE.

-- COOPERATION WITH NATO: ALTHOUGH FRANCE REMAINS

OUTSIDE OF THE INTEGRATED MILITARY ORGANIZATION, AND RESTRICTS ITS PARTICIPATION IN SOME NATO PROJECTS, COOPERATION WITH NATO HAS INCREASED DISCREETLY UNDER GISCARD, AS HAS BILATERAL US-FRENCH MILITARY COOPERATION. THE SOVIETS NO DOUBT ARE AWARE OF THIS DEVELOPMENT, AND UNHAPPY ABOUT IT.

-- THE FRENCH ELECTIONS: GISCARD'S RENEWED MANDATE HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO PURSUE BOLDER FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES, AND THE INDICATIONS ARE THAT HE WILL DO THIS IN THREE MAIN AREAS -- DISARMAMENT, AFRICA AND EUROPEAN UNIFICATION -- ALL LIKELY TO ANNOY THE SOVIETS. THEY ARE UNCOMFORTABLY AWARE OF THIS PROBABILITY.

5. DESPITE THESE NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENTS, BOTH THE FRENCH AND THE SOVIETS HAVE EVIDENTLY SEEN IT IN THEIR OVERALL INTERESTS, UNTIL VERY RECENTLY, TO AVOID A

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R 311454Z MAY 78
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PUBLIC BREAK. FROM THE SOVIET VIEWPOINT, RELATIONS WITH FRANCE HAVE REPRESENTED THE MOST IMPORTANT CLEAVAGE WITHIN THE WESTERN ALLIANCE. NOT ONLY HAS THIS BEEN USEFUL TO THE SOVIETS POLITICALLY AND FOR PROPAGANDA PURPOSES, BUT IT HAS ALSO GIVEN THE SOVIETS IMPORTANT LEVERAGE FOR INFLUENCING WESTERN POSITIONS (E.G., THE FRENCH DESIRE FOR PRUDENCE ON SOME ASPECTS OF CSCE). THE SOVIETS HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN RELUCTANT TO DAMAGE THEIR PRIVILEGED RELATIONS WITH PARIS. IT ALSO SEEMS EVIDENT FROM SOVIET KID GLOVE TREATMENT OF THE MAJORITY BEFORE THE FRENCH ELECTIONS (E.G., IN RECEIVING BARRE WARMLY IN MOSCOW LAST FALL) THAT THE SOVIETS PREFERRED TO SHORE UP THE GISCARD COALITION, IN ORDER TO PRECLUDE AN ELECTION VICTORY BY A LEFTIST ALLIANCE IN WHICH THE FRENCH COMMUNISTS WERE ONLY A JUNIOR PARTNER.

6. FROM THE FRENCH VIEWPOINT, GOOD RELATIONS WITH MOSCOW HAVE REMAINED AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF THE INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY WHICH HAS BEEN A GIVEN IN FRANCE SINCE DE GAULLE. NO FRENCH LEADER WOULD WANT TO RISK HIS "INDEPENDENT" IMAGE BY BURNING HIS BRIDGES WITH MOSCOW AND THIS WAS CERTAINLY A KEY FACTOR IN KEEPING UP THE FACADE OF GOOD BILATERAL RELATIONS DURING THE FRENCH ELECTION CAMPAIGN. GISCARD IS UNDER LESS PRESSURE ON THIS POINT NOW THAT THE ELECTIONS HAVE

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PASSED -- BUT HE IS LIKELY TO FEEL THE NEED TO PROVE HIS INDEPENDENT CREDENTIALS AGAIN BEFORE THE 1981 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. WHILE THIS WILL PROBABLY MEAN A FRENCH EFFORT TO PATCH IT UP WITH MOSCOW BEFORE THAT TIME, THE FRENCH ARE NOT LIKELY TO PUL THEIR PUNCHES ON ISSUES WHICH ARE IMPORTANT TO THEM, LIKE AFRICAN AND DISARMAMENT POLICIES.

7. IT MIGHT BE TEMPTING TO CONCLUDE THAT WORSENERD FRANCO-SOVIET RELATIONS WILL INDUCE THE FRENCH TOWARD CLOSER COOPERATION WITH THEIR OWN ALLIES, THE US IN PARTICULAR. WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT THE FRANCO-SOVIET RIFT PER SE WOULD HAVE SUCH AN EFFECT. IN FACT, THE FRENCH MAY FEEL OBLIGED TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES PUBLICLY FROM A NUMBER OF US AND ALLIED PROJECTS IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THEIR INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY STANCE. THE LAST-MINUTE PROBLEMS WE HAVE HAD WITH PARIS OVER THE NATO EAST-WEST STUDY -- AS WELL AS REVIVED FRENCH ANTIPATHY TO COORDINATING NATO CSCE POLICY -- MAY RESULT IN PART FROM THIS FACTOR. IT IS TRUE THAT, UNDER GISCARD, FRANCE HAS BEEN MORE COOPERATIVE WITHIN THE ALLIANCE AND BILATERALLY WITH THE US THAN UNDER DE GAULLE AND POMPIDOU; AND WE FEEL CONFIDENT THAT GISCARD SEES THIS OVERALL COOPERATION AS CLEARLY IN FRANCE'S INTEREST. IN ADDITION, US AND FRENCH PERCEPTIONS OF EAST-WEST RELATIONS ARE PROBABLY CLOSER NOW THAN THEY HAVE BEEN FOR YEARS, DUE TO A MELLOWING ON BOTH SIDES. WE WOULD NOT EXPECT THESE BASIC FRENCH ATTITUDES TO CHANGE, BUT WHAT WE COULD SEE IS FRENCH SELECTION OF A FEW ISSUES ON WHICH TO ASSERT THEIR INDEPENDENCE FROM US AND THE NATO ALLIES IN GENERAL. AT THE MOMENT, NATO CONSULTATIONS AND DISARMAMENT APPEAR TO BE THE MOST LIKELY FIELDS FOR SUCH ASSERTIVENESS.

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